

Ormand Family Activity

March 2019: Denver and the Brown Palace

We had discovered and toured the Bureau of Engraving near Fort Worth (see [fam_5state1.pdf](#)), and it was pretty good, but it was paper money, not coins. Coins are made at the Mint. When we found out where the U.S. Mint is in Denver, we set in our minds we had to see it, and after a few fruitless attempts (see [fam_colo17.pdf](#)), it became obvious that the only way it was going to work was to stay overnight in Denver close to the Mint *so we can get in line at 6:00 in the morning to get tour tickets*. It's about an hour trip from Fort Collins, and it takes some of us time in the morning to get ready for the day, so we would have to get up at 3am or 2am in order to get to the Mint before all the tickets are gone. That's not going to happen. Therefore, we plan a little vacation trip to Colorado with the intent of staying at a downtown hotel within walking distance of the Mint, so I can go and stand in line at 6:00 while Jerri prepares for the day.

Of course, there are lots of hotels in downtown Denver, but the purpose is a memorable experience at a historic hotel. The oldest hotel is the Oxford, near the train station (www.theoxfordhotel.com, doesn't appear to work). There is a hotel *in* the train station, the Crawford (www.thecrawfordhotel.com), and from what we saw when we passed through Union Station a few years ago, it would be interesting to stay there, but it is a hotel in an historic train station, not an historic hotel. And neither of those hotels are really in walking distance of the Mint. The most interesting candidate that is really in walking distance of the Mint is the Brown Palace. Henry Brown homesteaded in the Denver area, and had obtained a good deal of real estate. He donated a portion to the State of Colorado for a site for the Capitol, knowing that his other holdings in the vicinity would appreciate tremendously. Which of course they did, and Henry Brown became very wealthy. He then built a fancy hotel near the Capitol for use by dignitaries. That hotel, the Brown Palace, has been operating from its founding in 1891 to this day.

Our vacation starts with a visit to Fort Collins, to see our daughter who lives there, and my sister's family, likewise. Before we gather in the evenings, Jerri and I spend a couple of days exploring the downtown area. Fort Collins has a very nice downtown area, very walkable but not entirely shut off from vehicle traffic. There is sufficient parking, although the for-pay garage we used one day was a bit odd in that you are expected to estimate how much time you will need and pay for that

amount of time. I like the typical Tucson garage arrangement in which you get a magnetic-stripe or barcode ticket when you enter the garage and then use a machine (or a human cashier for UofA structures) to pay for the amount of time you actually used. There are a lot of retail shops (unlike downtown Tucson) and a lot of eating places. In the center of it all is a street that has been blocked off and transformed into a pedestrian parkway, which would be a lovely place to stop and rest - if it had more benches and a few drinking fountains.

We also checked out the route of the trolley. The Fort Collins Municipal Railway Society (www.fortcollinstrolley.org) maintains the historic track that runs down Mountain Avenue, past lovely old homes, between (close to) downtown and City Park. They operate a classic trolley car on summer weekend afternoons, similar to what the Old Pueblo Trolley Company used to do before the Modern Streetcar went into operation. Since it was Wednesday, we didn't see the car, but we did see a workcrew busy at a switch.



Now, on Wednesday afternoon, it is time to proceed to Denver and settle into our hotel room. Lots of construction on I-25. Lots of fun dealing with the maze of one-way streets in downtown Denver. But eventually we turn off Broadway onto Tremont, and the amazingly anachronistic 19th Century sandstone building looms before us. It's a fancy place; I don't know where you would put your car otherwise, but we just turn it over to the valet. The doorman hands us and our bags to a bell person who takes us first to the counter in the atrium to check in and then up to our 9th floor room. I've heard that you tip porters and bell-hops and such \$1 per bag, hopefully the \$5 I

passed him wasn't a disappointment.

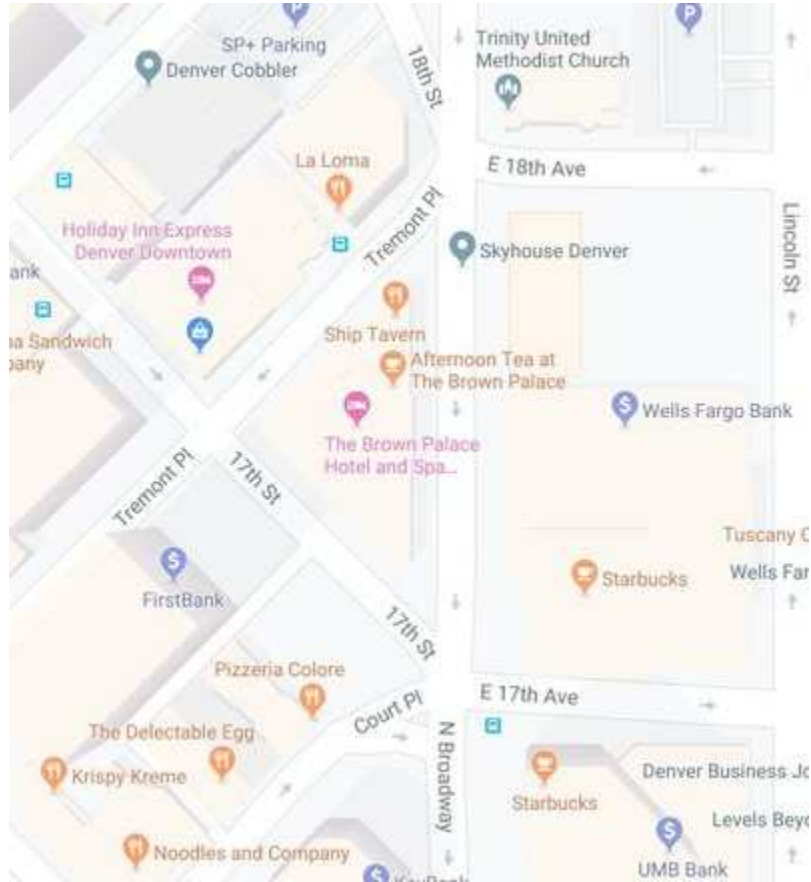
The room is nice but not opulent. Besides the main room there is the bathroom with a tub and a separate shower stall. Two sinks in the counter. Across the entry is a dressing room with a vanity and the large closet. The most striking feature are the trio of tall windows admitting light and a view down into 17th Street. The tall building on the left is First Bank, and the one on the right is Key Bank (something about banks that they can put up these huge buildings - I guess providing office space in large cities is a profitable real-estate investment). Directly ahead is the Sheraton Hotel tower, and we can see 16th Street between the buildings, the people and the free shuttle coming and going, and the lights.



For dinner this evening, we try out the Ship's Tavern, which is at the north point of the building at ground level. The windows are visible in the photo. There are model ships here and there and just inside the windows, and a section of a mast with a crow's nest in the center of the small dining room (most of the room is the bar). We are seated near the window, so we can look across Tremont at another fancy place, the Navarre Building, which turns out to have been designed by the same architect who did the Brown. I later pick up a hint that this building houses the American Museum of Western Art (Anschutz Collection). If we ever come back to hang out downtown, we may visit this. We are also seated near a piano, and a fellow guest tells us that Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8:00, an amazing pianist entertains. We don't hang around to find out.

Here's an idea of how the Brown Palace is situated with the major north-south street Broadway on the east side and the angle of Tremont and 17th on the west. In the photo of the Brown exterior above, the skywalk across Tremont is visible. When we were exploring the hotel this evening, we find and cross the skywalk. On the other side is the ballroom. I later learn that this building is a Holiday Inn, which was originally built by the Brown owners in more recent times as a more affordable place to stay, and then the Brown Tower eventually was rebadged as a Holiday Inn, but still owned and operated by the same company. The Brown still has a florist in the corner of this building.

There is a five-point intersection at the south point of the building, where Broadway cuts across 17th Street and Court Place branches off. Court proceeds southwest until it comes to Colfax, the major east-west street, and turns into Cherokee on the other side. The Mint is at that corner of Colfax and Cherokee, about four blocks away.





The hotel is built around a central atrium. At ground level is the main desk, the concierge, the restaurants, and the spa. The floor of the atrium is set up with tables and chairs. A musician is playing a piano. Across from the desk counter is a display case with two old registry books with the signatures of previous famous guests along with photos of others. The grand staircase is across the atrium up to the level with the arches seen at the bottom of the photo; this is where all the meeting rooms are. We later discover that one of those meeting rooms was the frequent venue of Sun Yat Sen, the founder of the Republic of China, and Taiwanese Chinese visit here to see the room and honor him.

Other historical displays at the atrium floor include a description of a scandalous public murder committed in the hotel, and an explanation of how the hotel observes the National Western Stock Show every year by having the grand champion steer led through the lobby during afternoon tea. One year, the animal got spooked and ran outside and down the city streets before it was recaptured.

The ceiling is a Tiffany stained-glass marvel. The end of the week is cloudy in Denver, and the light isn't as bright as it might be. This is the view from the 7th floor. Across is visible the glass bricks of the 8th floor. The ninth floor where we are is apparently above the skylight, and also faces the atrium through glass bricks.





A slightly out-of-focus view of the atrium floor. The desk is directly opposite. The spa is to the left. The concierge's stand is at the upper right, and there is a fancy old stainless-steel drinking fountain (that still works) right at that corner.

Spa? When the Brown was built here, there was an artesian well on the property, which the owners developed for use. The elevator was originally operated by the hydraulic pressure of the well. In the hallway next to the elevator is an antique brass gauge monitoring the well water pressure; this gauge has been in service since the hotel was built, even though the original well failed and a new well was sunk just outside the north point (next to the gauge are photos of the well construction), right outside the Ship's Tavern restaurant. It wasn't part of the original hotel, but at some point the owners came up with the idea of bolstering the hotel's income with a spa featuring the well's water.

The next morning, I arise at 5:30 and embark on the four-block hike, to find out that (as planned) March, before the schools let out for summer, is one of the better times to visit the Mint. When I get there, only about 15 people precede me, and by the time the ticket office opens at 7:00, there are perhaps twice as many after me. A treasury agent came out to get "pre-orders" (visitors sign up for their preferred tour time until the tour reaches the 50-person limit) and entertain us, and confirms that in summer, the line wraps around the block.

Having signed up for the 11:00 tour, I return to the hotel to collect Jerri and go to breakfast. I noticed a breakfast spot on the route - The Delectable Egg on Court Place, visible on the map above. It is very well

patronized, so it must be a good place. It bills itself as "the home of the Denver omelette", so of course I must get one. It comes with a little Denver flag on a toothpick.

When we visited Chicago, we noticed that they have their own flag. I knew Phoenix has a flag. It seems that Denver also has a flag. I guess it's supposed to be the sun setting over the mountains.



We finally tour the Mint! It was pretty good, especially the story of Michael Carrigan, who smuggled thousands of dollars worth of gold bars in the early '20s before he was caught. I was somewhat disappointed to learn that the Denver Mint doesn't actually work with molten metals anymore; suppliers provide ribbons of metal, and the Mint stamps the blanks out. The waste web and defective coins are returned for recasting. On the other hand, I was surprised to learn that the Denver Mint also makes coins for other countries, such as Mexican pesos and Israeli shekels.

Another thing we learn at the Mint is that, now that we've seen coins, we can see paper money at the Money Museum at the Federal Reserve Bank, just up 16th Street. So that's what Jerri and I do. It was mostly for young people to learn something about debt and interest and saving, but they also had a pretty good display of paper money, from an actual original Continental note to Confederate bills to silver certificates to modern Federal Reserve notes.

After that, it was getting close to the time when I needed to go to pick up Faith at the airport. We took the free shuttle back down to Tremont and picked up some sandwiches at the Corner Bakery Cafe. It was late afternoon, and the High Tea was still underway at the Brown Palace. *Now* we understand the tables and chairs on the atrium floor - lots of people enjoying their tea and finger food while a musical group entertains. This would be another great experience that we must pass for this trip.

By the time we got back to the hotel room, I no longer had time to actually eat the sandwich, so I took it with me. I had planned a Mapquest route from the hotel, and of course it said that the fastest route was to go north to I-70 on downtown surface streets. Faster, sure, if you don't get turned around and lost, like I did. I finally had to stop and consult my own (previously-downloaded) cell-phone map to figure

out where I was and how to get back to the route. There was heavy construction on I-70, and all things told, it was well after her arrival before I got to the airport. I instructed her to meet me at the arrivals curb for American, but when I drove by, she was nowhere in sight. I stopped at the end to swap texts with her, and we established that she was actually upstairs at the departures curb! This took enough time that an airport security officer came up and told me I couldn't stay there, and I was getting ready to take another loop around when Faith ran up! She appreciated the other half-sandwich on the trip back to the hotel.

We can just relax for a while before it is time for our dinner plans: meeting John and Becky and their children and Charity at our favorite Denver place - Cinzzetti's (www.cinzzettis.com/colorado), a belly-buster Italian buffet of innumerable chef-prepared dishes, polished off with cannolis or gelato or spumoni. Afterwards, we bid John and Becky farewell for this trip and return to our hotel room.



The next day, we are ready to continue our adventure together. Denver is the "Mile High City", and like the Capitol, the Brown Palace has to mark their location of surveyed mile above sealevel, on the flight of stairs between the 4th and 5th floors.

I also note that the style on the 8th and 9th floors is more Art Deco, while it's more Victorian on the other floors. When I returned from getting the tickets yesterday morning, I climbed up all the steps. That's how I located this plaque. That was also a pretty good work-out.

Breakfast is a return to the Delectable Egg. Afterwards, we continue back to the Mint so Mom and I can get our official "we were here" photo. This is at the main door, which is the one we left from yesterday.



This is the door we went into.

It is something around a mile from the Mint to the Molly Brown House. Jerri and I had visited there before, and Charity and Faith had expressed an interest. The tour guide we got this time was rather more expressive and quirky than the last time, and we all enjoyed the tour very much. We note that Margaret Brown ("Molly" was a name unknown by her that was applied after her death for artistic license - "The Unsinkable Molly Brown") was unrelated to the real-estate mogul Henry Brown, but was a frequent guest at the Brown Palace. Afterwards, we hiked a few blocks west to the Byers-Evans House, and took the tour there as well, the last one of the day. In fact, our tour re-emerged into

the gift shop where a reception for some Women's History event was underway. We didn't stay for it. Instead, we hiked back north, across the Civic Center Park between the Denver County building and the Capitol, across Colfax, and back to the 16th Street Mall. The rain that was threatened that evening had started to fall; it was supposed to snow. We took refuge and had our bite of lunch at the Noodles and Company on Court Place. While we were there, we had a repeat of our Amarillo experience of having a vagrant pester us for money or food *inside the restaurant* before the restaurant staff ejected him. Denver has a real problem with homeless people; the Civic Park is full of them, and the 16th Street Mall is crowded with them, some of them doing street entertainments (music, juggling) for tips, and some of them obviously mentally impaired.

After lunch we brave the rain and continue back to the Brown. At the five-point intersection, Jerri notices this plaque in the sidewalk explaining how the original city of Denver was arranged parallel to the river, but when Statehood arrived had shifted to the north-south standard city grid layout. This explains the unique character of intersections along Colfax and Broadway.



More of Denver's high buildings, right next to their older and smaller neighbor. On the left, the Wells Fargo Bank building, and on the right, UMB Bank. Very impressive, especially with the rainy city ambiance.



The street-level view of the Brown Palace from the south. In the rain. That's the spire of Trinity United Methodist further up Broadway.

The other purpose of staying at the Brown Palace is to dine at the fancy restaurant, the Palace Arms. It is open only on Friday and Saturday evening, so I had to make a reservation with the concierge when we arrived. It is also a dress-up place, so we trotted our formal clothes with us on the plane.

This was a four-course dinner with a very attentive waiter, who cleared off the table and set new silver between each course. There was even a spoonful of sherbet before the main course to "cleanse our palates".



The decor of the dining room is based on Revolutionary War themes. There are paintings of men in period uniforms on the walls, and battle standards on staffs set in brackets. I think the two sisters enjoyed the experience.

Mom and Dad posing outside the door after dinner.





The ladies were all given red roses. Here is Dad with his two lovely daughters. Faith took the opportunity to wear her Zonie cactus skirt.

The next morning is our departure date. Since I know we aren't going to have time to try out the other hotel restaurant (and breakfast spot), Ellyngton's, I order a room service delivery for 7:00 the following morning. This is accomplished by marking a form and hanging it on the outside doorknob before turning in the night before. Sure enough, at 7:00, there is a knock on the door and a staffer pushes in a folding table cart with our orders. I'm sure she wondered at our inventiveness of pinning the drapes over the windows (the pull-down blinds don't quite do the job) with the hangers from the closet that have spring clips. When we open the drapes (after she leaves), we notice it is snowing outside! As I feared. Charity assures us, with the voice of long experience, that such light snowfall, and as relatively warm as it is outside, presents us with no danger. Of course she's right.

After finishing our breakfast, the packing, and the other preparations for our travel day, we leave our room and depart our separate ways (after tipping the valets again). Faith is staying with Charity another day, to return tomorrow evening, but we are leaving today at noon. Maybe because it's Saturday, but traffic on I-70 is light, the weather is

good (the snow tapers off before we reach the airport), there is hardly anybody at the security checkpoint, and we enjoy a pleasant and stress-free flight back home.